

Strip Search

*A performance piece
for male stripper*

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(The action takes place during a male strip routine in a slightly run-down gay bar in East London. The routine has to reach certain points by certain stages in the script, but is otherwise what the stripper devises. The written sections are performed completely separately from the routine, with the actor “freezing” before each transition, which is also accompanied by an obvious lights change.)

Sound: T1 (Spoken Intro + Fanfare + Drums + Intro to “Waiting for a Hero”.)

(S takes off beret, undoes jacket. He sees someone in the audience.)

SQUADDIE: Oh no, not you again. I thought you’d given this one a miss. **(To audience)** I didn’t see him behind the pillar. That’s the worst of this job. You get stalkers. There’s this guy been following me round for the last eight weeks. For a start, he makes Danny de Vito look like Brad Pitt. Face like a sow’s twat. He always stands right up front at the side there. He keeps hoping I’m going to pick him for the baby oil again. Not a fucking chance, mate. Dream on. It was one of the early dates, just after I turned professional. I didn’t know any better. I just picked anybody out of the audience. I didn’t know the power I had – I’d forgotten, see. And this night, there was an oversexed dwarf ready to rush

the stage. It's meant to be a game, see. I should have realised he was taking it too seriously.

I should have seen it in those little piggy eyes. Greedy. I gave him the baby oil and he got *his* dick out too, before you can say George Michael, and he started to wank himself off while he squirted oil all over me. Get off! There's only one penis round here, mate. And that's mine. That's what they've come to see. Well, you have, haven't you? Cut the cackle and get them off, that's what you're thinking, aren't you? That's the system. And me, I play the system.

But you mustn't show it too early. Where's the suspense? Where's the tension? So you have to wait a bit.... And admire... the skin.... the pecs.... the abs.... It's Alfred Hitchcock really, innit? Suspense.

Sound: T2 ("One Night Only". S takes off Jacket.)

I love reading Celebrity Interviews. Those 60-second jobbies. When I'm a celebrity I'm going to give interviews all the time. Like "What is your idea of perfect happiness?" Listening to the pay-out of a fruit machine, which never stops...

Sound: T3 (Arcade sounds. Reduce volume when he starts to speak)

SQUADDIE is now about 10 years old. 1993.)

All right, old fruit machine, this is it. I'm going to take you for everything you got.

(Fade out arcade sounds)

I've been lucky all day. First thing, Terry dropped a tenner out of his trousers. They was so all over each other they never noticed when I picked it up. They never notice me, except when Mum shouts at me and Terry thumps me. Mum tells me, "Stop looking at me like that, you little bugger. Hit him Tel." So he does. Right in the eye. And then when the Social asks, I have to say I walked into a door or something. The Social are bloody useless. They was in London too, before we moved to here to the arsehole of the world, so Mum could be with Terry.

Sometimes, Terry makes me watch while he's giving her one.

(Puts money in, pulls handle. Watches greedily. Nothing.)

Cherries! Who wants cherries? Cherries is crap. You give me Bells or Bars, or Nothing. **(Pulls handle.)**
Nothing.

(To machine:) Now I'm warning you. Think you got a nice cushy number here, dontcha? But -

(confidential) just when you think you bled me rotten, see? – **(Shouts)** Pow! Jackpot! Double jackpot! Forty quid! Chunk-chunk-chunk-chunk! Sweetest sound in the world. Everyone in the arcade turns and looks at you, but you act casual, like it's no big deal cos you win double jackpots all the time. And you can feel their eyes on you – you, the only black kid in Treorchy - as you go up to the cashier's with your hands stuffed with tokens, dripping with them, slipping them all over the floor like you just don't give a toss. And all the other punters are – deep – livid – green.

It's not luck, it's skill. Eyes open, wits about you, quick reactions, think on your feet. **(He presses the handle, watches the cogs going round. One stops.)** A bar – yesss! **(Next one stops)** Two bars! Now you're talking. Double jackpot here we come. Then I'll walk out cool as you like over to Boots and get some of that "Passion" by that Elizabeth Taylor in the shiny black box, that Mum says she likes. Then maybe she'll notice me.

(The third strip stops.) A sodding lemon. Collect? No, 'it isn't worth it, s'only a quid. So – hold... hold... **(He presses two "Hold" buttons and pulls the lever.)** Come on, baby. Don't let me down. **(It stops)** Bastard! No – wait. We got a nudge. Where is it? Where're you hiding, my little bar? **(He bends down, squinting to see if there's a Bar about to drop**

down.) Yeah. There you are, my little darling. Come on down, for Mum. **(He nudges it into position)** Yeah! Five quid! We're on the treasure trail! Go, go, go. Seven... ten...fifteen... Jackpot?

Collect? You must be joking. I told you it was my lucky day. **(Deep breath)** Dear God in Heaven, gimme the double, make it forty quid, and I'll get Elizabeth Taylor's "Passion", 75 millilitres for £21.99 and make Mum love me. **(Presses button)** Double or nothing, double or nothing, double or nothing. Take your time... Easy... **(Closes his eyes. Agonising pause. He opens them.)** Nothing. **(Pause. He is so disappointed.)** Oh, Mum, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Sound: T4 ("Bring me to life" opening.)

"What is your greatest fear?" Finding an amusement arcade and not being able to walk past it. No, I didn't mean that. I don't need them any more, I don't. I'm going to be a star now, and Mum's dead.

Sound: T5 ("Bring me to life" 2. S takes Armband off.)

(1996) I'll never forget the first time I knew blokes really fancied me. I must have been about thirteen, and bunking off from school one afternoon, cos it was dead boring.

So I was going down the arcade as usual. But on the way I went into this toilet, see, opposite the Zebras' Rugby Ground, cos I needed a pee. And this brickie comes in, covered in cement dust, had a few pints lunchtime. And he's standing there next to me wanking himself off.

He's got this big flabby thing, one of those WYSIWYG dicks. WYSIWYG. "What you see is what you get". And he looked hard at me and I must have looked much more than 13, cos he stared at my dick, not a sign of that scared look you get when they think you're jailbait. I'd shot up that last year. 6ft, even at 13, and like a beanpole. And that's, like, big, cos they're little blokes in South Wales, as a rule.

And he went into this cubicle, and he turned round and looked at me. I wasn't queer, of course, but I followed him in.

I was dead cool about it, real slow, cos I just knew he really, really wanted it. I just sat down on the top of the bog seat, and opened the top of my sweatpants. And I forced him down on his knees with my eyes. And right at that moment, I knew – at last – that I had some real power.

Sound: T6. ("Bad". S rips vest off.)

Next question: "Which living person do you most admire?" Me. Cos it's all I got.

(1997)

One afternoon in the arcade, this man came and played the machine next to me. And when I ran out of money, he just kept feeding more coins into my machine, didn't look at me or anything. About an hour later, he just said, "Would you like a lift anywhere?" Very polite, nice voice, nice vowels, like we'd just had tea together or something. But I knew what he was after because it was all over the Sunday papers about then. Scandals in care homes all over North Wales. You know the sort of thing. But I thought to myself, why not? Where else you going to get that kind of money when you're fourteen?

He weren't a bad looking bloke actually, about forty, kind of stocky. Not that I fancied him, of course. I was a bit scared, tell the truth, cos I thought to myself, what's he going to want? I wasn't going to let him fuck me, no fucking way, that's how you got AIDS.

In the car, I started to get nervous. But we drove out of town, up the valley onto the hillside, and you could see the lights of Treorchy down below like a Christmas tree. And we sat looking at them, not saying anything. And I thought, what the fuck do I do now? But he got out the car, went behind some trees, took his pants down, turned his back to me and bent over. And I

thought, well, you don't catch anything if you're the one Doing It, do you?

Afterwards, he became a bit of a regular. I used to meet him in the car park of the Stag Hotel. Sometimes he took me to Cardiff, to the Kings Cross - they never asked my age. Later, I used to go in on the train. Only two quid return. I still had a kid's pass, see – under 15.

1998

People say it's all sad and dangerous and these dirty old blokes can't get it anywhere else or they just want to strangle you, or something, but my regulars were OK. I'd hang around on Caroline Street till a punter came along. Caroline Street! Just say the name and I can smell the fish and chips. Best chips in the world, Caroline Street.

Course I did get the odd nutter, and yeah, once I did need a few stitches at A & E at the University Hospital, but it weren't nothing serious. That's the way it goes. Sometimes life just falls that way, not even Cherries. But it beats shoplifting any day. I used to turn a hundred and twenty for giving them one without a rubber.

Sound: T7. ("Bad" 2. S takes belt off.)

(1998)

Of course, I got caught. Not what you think, though. Stealing a car. But I never did. I got to tell the truth, there was this punter and he'd driven me down North Road past the University in this really flash Mercedes. We were going to find some lay-by he knew on the bypass, on Eastern Avenue, and he stops off at a 7-11 cos he wants to get some cigarettes, and he leaves me in the car. I can see there's a bit of a queue in the shop, and I'm wondering what it feels like to drive a big Merc, so I get behind the wheel, and before I know it, there's this copper leaning in the window, saying "Is this your car, sir?" all sarcastic, like. Of course, he only did it cos I was black.

So what's my punter going to do? He's a married man. Politician – English. Got a holiday home in the Brecon Beacons. On the telly a lot - thought I recognised him. He comes out of the shop, takes one look, panics, and belts off to the nearest police station to report his car stolen. And who they going to believe, me, or some posh white bastard?

Three months in a Young Offenders. Stoke Heath, over the English border. Cos the "victim" was known to be tough on crime and the judge wasn't going to argue with him, was he? All in it together, aren't they?

They say borstal toughens you up, and they're right. Up every morning at six and doing PE. That's where I

started to get some muscle. Anyone asks me how they can get a body like mine, I tell them, take to a life of crime and go to prison.

Then after PE, we had to lay our kit out for inspection. "Ready for inspection, Sir!" – always had to call the Screws "Sir". It was as bad as being in the army – no, worse. Cos at least you got paid in the army.

And then there was so-called "training and rehabilitation". Drilling holes in bits of metal. You can even get a certificate for crummy window cleaning. But mostly they teach you how to know your place.

Sound: T8. ("Bad" 3. S takes trousers off)

Christian knew his place, which was at the bottom of the heap. He was from Bristol, drifted to Cardiff cos the drugs were cheaper. He was this tiny skinny Irish bloke, huge Irish family, last one of ten and always put upon, and I met him in the showers. He came in about three weeks after me. Burglary, see. He done a lot of it cos he could squeeze through bathroom windows.

First day in, they shave off all your hair and make you get in the showers with all the others, and they give you this anti-lice shampoo so everyone else can take the piss out of you.

So we're all standing round Christian and he's shrinking away cos the water's so cold, and we're surrounding him and pushing him in under the water and he's letting out these really high, girly screams. Just asking for it, he was.

And somehow he slips and falls, cos the tiles are dead slippery. But he grabs my arm –

and I couldn't help but steady him, kind of instinct, and he looks at me with these big green eyes. And it was like time froze, and a shock went through me. I said, "OK, that's enough," to the others.

Most of them stopped, but Frazer – he was the Borstal Daddy at the time – ignored me, so I smashed his head against the tiles. That took care of that, though I did two weeks solitary in a strip cell for it. No windows, no light, no furniture, nothing. Fucking screws....

Christian was always following me around after that. I kept telling him to fuck off but I couldn't shake him. The other guys was convinced we was both homos. I had a couple of fights over it, and that got me a few more months on my sentence, when I cracked someone's head open for calling me queer.

Sound: T9. ("Fighter".)

(1999)

When I got out of Stoke Heath, at least I had a bit of a body on me. All that exercise. Plus of course a certificate to show I could clean windows. But I thought to myself, do I want to hang around Cardiff cleaning windows, or do I want to see a bit of the world? No contest. So I joined the army. Boy soldier. Infantry, four years minimum. Royal Welch.

And bugger me if I wasn't on training at Catterick six months later, when who should show up but Christian. He'd only fucking followed me into the army, hadn't he?

Sound: T10. ("Hero". S takes boots off)

(2004)

So there we are in Al Basrah. I was a corporal by then, just turned 21. I could have left, cos I'd done my four years, but I still went for the old adventure bollocks cos I was too young to have done any fighting. And Christian was in my Platoon, so that was OK. It was like he was my good luck charm.

So there we was, patrolling the old quarter of Basra, not far from the ruins of that police station where we'd rescued those undercover guys. We weren't very popular at that moment, I can tell you. Then this kid comes round the corner, running and beckoning. "Come quickly," he says. "My grandmother, she kicked by donkey." And I think, is it a trap? And I look at this kid, can't be more than eight years old, big brown eyes

like so innocent and so worried, and Christian says, "Shall we go see, Corp?" So him and his mate goes down this side alley, and we cover him from the main road. Next thing we know there's two – three – shots and they're both lying on the ground, and that sweet little innocent kid is jumping up and down and laughing and shaking his fist and shouting something about Allah and the Mahdi Army. Course, he disappears into a courtyard before we can grab him.

We ran across the kid again later, after we'd got Christian back to the military hospital. Went out on patrol through the bazaar, just saw him, pure luck. Took him down by the Shatt al' Arab and held his head under water for three minutes at a time. Then we strung him up under the railway bridge. Stripped him stark naked, tied him up and gagged him, shoved a whistle up his arse. "Blow that if you need help," I said. And we left him there, swinging in the heat of the midday sun. Hundred and fifteen degrees it was. You know, I'm not proud of myself, but we couldn't think of anything else to do. We couldn't shoot the little fucker, could we? Though God knows I was tempted.

Sound: T11 ("Hero" 2.)

(2005)

I couldn't stay on with the Warriors any more. Six years was enough. It wasn't the same without Christian. Soon as he'd left hospital he'd got a

discharge from the Army, with a commendation for bravery, a campaign medal, a miserable 10K severance, and no pension cos the Army said he wasn't disabled. Christian didn't fight it, and no-one else stood up for him.

They'd put a metal plate in Christian's head. He didn't look any different, and he tried to make a joke of it. Said if he blew his nose he could get Radio One. But he kept having these nightmares, and these headaches. So what's he to do but collect his benefits and sit around staring at the walls all day. Home fit for heroes? Don't you believe it, bruv. No-one wants to give you a job, they all think you're a psycho. And I got to tell the truth, sometimes they're right.

He couldn't hold down a job, I couldn't settle to anything. All my severance pay went on the arcades. So we used to rumble old queens from Clapham Common, Christian and me. Of course, I was only turning the tricks for the money. I wasn't really queer. And Christian was just a mate, wasn't he? Wasn't he?

The queens would take me back to some posh house in Battersea or Earlsfield, and I'd make sure the door was on the latch, or a window was open, so Christian could nip in while I was fucking them and take the laptop or i-pod, or whatever. Later we'd flog it to some dodgy bloke in Brixton or Peckham, and divvy up the money.

Christian'd mostly spend his on his cars, he loved cars, always doing them up, he was. And on a bit of skunk of course, or some crack, for the pains in his head. And me? Course, I went down the arcade.

Sound: T12. ("One Night Only" 2.)

(Routine) I can't stop thinking about that celebrity interview. "When and where were you happiest?" One night after I'd had this punter, and Christian had done the business downstairs, we met up later at this Rasta squat in Kennington. He'd lifted this big carriage clock he thought might be worth a few quid, and I was laying into him cos I could see it was shite, and I'd seen a fucking state-of-the-art camcorder in the house that he could have had. I was being all mouthy, and Christian opened up the back of the clock, and there was this fucking great wad of notes. Three grand, in fifties.

So I went down the offie and I bought two of the best bottles of Champagne they had, vintage they was, cost us eighty-four quid.

(Sound: T13. "Lee Scratch Perry". Background for rasta squat.)

And we sat out the back, in the garden of this squat, full of dope plants and bits of old cookers, and we drank champagne from the bottle, and planned how the money was going to change our lives. We'd get a flat

together, we'd both straighten ourselves out. Christian would start a garage, and I'd – well, that bit wasn't quite clear – but we sat there in the garden, and we looked at the sky, with Lee "Scratch" Perry in the background, and we saw – possibilities. **(Fade T13)**

But it was only three grand we'd found. And anyway, while we were swigging the champagne, someone else in the squat nicked the rest of the money.

Sound: T14 "Fuck you like an animal"

Ok, so it's baby oil time. Which of you wants to rub baby oil into my smooth gorgeous body? Feel the muscles. Stroke the skin. Don't be shy, it's your big moment. All those of you who came in just to see me tonight.... There's got to be one brave soul. I won't bite you.... Take a chance....

(He brings up a member of the audience, gets him – must be male - to rub in the baby oil. While he is doing so:)

You seen our brave boys on the TV, you've had your wet dreams about them with their big pecs and biceps and their big guns. Show you who's boss, order you about.... That's how you like it, innit?

(Takes back oil and hands the punter back into the audience:)

Thank you very much, sir. Give him a big round for being such a sport.

Fade Sound T14

(2007)

I'll never forget the first time I did a strip onstage. It was Amateur Night at the "White Swan". Hundred quid prize. I'd lost the Clapham squat and I was sleeping anywhere I could find - doorways sometimes, hostels - if I couldn't find a punter for all night. That winter it was so cold, I'd sometimes go with blokes just to get a bit of warmth. I couldn't even stay with Christian cos he was inside again. Armed robbery this time – feeding Mr Crack he was by then.

The contestant who was stripping was really fat, and he couldn't move for peanuts. You couldn't even see his dick in all the folds of fat. And I said to myself, "You can do better than that..." So I went in for it.

Funny how scared I was. I mean, I'd been selling sex for years, you'd think I would have been up for anything.

But the thought of being under those lights, with all those eyes.... But once I was up there, and the music started, well.... That's the secret. Concentrate on the music. Forget everything else....

Sound: T15. ("Fighter" 2. S takes trunks off.)

I didn't win the strip contest, because it was fixed, a shoe-in for someone the landlord fancied. But I came second, fifty quid, not bad.

Next punter I had, I put twenty quid on my Pay-As-You-Go, started to ring round the pubs. Once I found out how much they were paying the regular strippers I offered to do it for twenty quid less. That's the way to play the system.

Sound: T16. ("Bring Me to Life" 3. S Removes g-string and gets flag.)

(2007)

First paid gig I got, I was so excited, I went round to tell Christian. He'd got parole, on account of his war record. He'd got a different flat, on the Aylesbury Estate off the Old Kent Road – Winslow Block – sublet from a friend of a mate. Sixth floor. Lift wasn't working, of course, and there was all these needles in the stairwell. It was the first time I'd been to see him there, so it was a bit of a job to find him, but eventually I got to his front door. It was just hanging off its hinges. The lock had been smashed in. It felt just like in Al Basrah. I mean, anyone could have been in there.

I pushed the door open. Slowly. I was scared shitless.
(He crawls in) Christian? Christian?

He was lying on the floor with his head on the sofa. Someone had put a cushion over his face to deaden the noise of the gun. There were scorch marks on it. And they'd fired three shots.

Sound: T17. "Watch out + 3 explosions)

(He thrusts three times.)

Most of the top of his head was blown off, cos the shot came from so close. His brain was all over the sofa. It had dried. It looked like cat food. The metal plate that had been in the back of his head was dug into the arm of the sofa. Not much blood. Very dead. God knows how long he'd been there. It's not fucking fair. Survives three tours of Iraq, then cops it from some gangsta in London.

I held his hand, which was a pretty stupid thing to do, cos how was he to know? And then I started to cry. Cos Christian, well, he wasn't much, but he was my mate and this country had never given him any sort of chance, like it never give me any sort of chance, and if he hadn't tried to better himself in the army, and if he hadn't tried to help that cute kid in Al Basrah and got a bullet in his skull, and if the army had looked after him after he came out, and if he'd been able to say he was gay which he was, I know, or why was he always

following me, and anyway, nobody deserves to get blown away just cos they've stepped on someone's toes or made off with someone's wad, however fucked up they are. And I sat there and I just cried and stroked his arm. I cried because I – I loved him, I cried because he was the only person I ever loved. I cried for him, and for me too, and I cried for love. I hadn't cried since I was ten-year-old, when I lost two pounds sixty on a one-armed bandit.

I looked at that small, frail, milk-white dead body, and I thought, "That could have been me." I thought, "Where are you going to be in five year's time, mate? You haven't even got a home of your own. You're twenty-four for Chrissakes. What are you doing with your life? What would Christian want you to do?"

I thought and thought about it, long after dark, and then I realised, Fuck - I'm meant to be at the pub.

So I stepped backwards carefully out the door, wiped the door handle, made sure nobody saw me, and fucked off out of there. No-one ever come after me. I never even knew when the funeral was. Or where they took him. Where he is now.

Sound: T18. ("Waiting for a Hero" 2.)

I gave up the arcades, started to save a bit. I still sweat when I see one, but I walk past. Then I rang the Gay Switchboard. Got a flat share. Arthur and his boyfriend, Des. Leather queens. Arthur's in marketing. Norwood. Nice. I've been learning to cook.

"What is your favourite fantasy?" That I'm putting a meal on the table, and Christian's going to walk through the door and sit down to it. Cos - as I sat there holding Christian's hand, it suddenly all became clear, what I was. Clear as crystal and too fucking late.

I'm going to get out of stripping. It's a mug's game. Give it five years at the most. Could stretch it longer, I suppose, get a bit more leathery and pervy, but even so it can't last for ever.

"How often do you have sex?" Not often these days. Don't do the punters any more. In any case, I can't take sex seriously now.

Sound: T19. ("Waiting for a Hero" 3. S uses dildo.)

Last time I went home with a man from a pub – no, not a punter, this time it was for me. He was a nice cuddly teacher type. Anyway we were doing it, in the dark and – I don't know what happened, but I could see the outline of his head on the pillow, and suddenly it wasn't his head at all, it was Christian's head, and it was blown

away, and I felt so sick, it all just came up, and – well, the teacher was very nice about it. “Don’t worry, it’ll come off in the shower,” he said. “Can I get you a glass of water?”

Like I said, I don’t have sex much any more.

Sound: T20. “Waiting for a Hero” 4. S takes flag off.

(Points at his dick) There it is. My weapon, my chopper, my gun, my pork sword. Sometimes I look at it in the mirror and it doesn’t seem like part of me at all. Like it was grafted on. Stick the tail on the donkey, stick the dick on the stripper.

“Have you ever said, ‘I love you’, and not meant it?” I have never said ‘I Love You’. Period.

Sound: T21 (“Searching”. Only naked dance.)

I’m registered disabled. True. They know their stuff at Terrence Higgins Trust. I had Disability Living Allowance for a bit, after I got my diagnosis, but they’ve cut that now. But I got a good Social Worker, I go to the drop-in, I’m on the waiting list for a council flat. The system’s there, so use it. Why not? Welcome to Planet Poz.

“How would you like to be remembered?” I would like to be remembered..... I would like to be remembered. By someone.

Sound: T22. (“Rule Britannia”. S puts flag on dick and beret on.)

(Routine.)

There it is. Union fucking Jack. Our glorious flag. Something worth dying for. Something Christian died for – yes he did. In his shitty sublet with the smashed door and the broken heating and the piss on the balcony, he died for this – piece of rag. And nobody can bring him back. I seen it all, I seen how the system works. Bent cops, vicious screws, lying politicians on the make, stupid social workers ticking their stupid fucking boxes, poor fucked up boys dying on council estates – suck them in, use them, spit them out, forget them. And the rest of us getting what we can where we can, cos that’s all there is. Gentlemen – and ladies – I give you – Squaddie!

(He waves the St George flag on his cock. Then he takes the flag, and very slowing goes to wipe his arse with it. Freezes.)

THE END